

let the healing begin

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IF Team A has its way, the MCA division elections will proceed with a contest. Likewise, Team B wants the division elections postponed indefinitely while the grassroots are furious being told that there is an election with no contests.

As in any peace formula, no one side should be fully satisfied and that is why the MCA leaders must seriously make sure it works.

It will not be easy, though. Harsh words have been exchanged and suspicions run deep, but time will heal the wounds. The players involved are tired and Malaysians, especially the Chinese community, are equally tired of the open fight among the MCA leaders.

The support for the MCA has been eroded because of the fight. However, the DAP is not gaining any mileage simply because the Chinese community is peeved with its brand of politics.

The MCA leaders cannot preach the importance of unity, at community or grassroots level, if they are incapable of maintaining unity themselves.

The peace formula must thus be given a chance to work. It is not a question of whether Team A or Team B won - the winner must be the MCA.

Party leaders, especially at division level, may not fully welcome the "status quo" formula, but sacrifices have to be made for peace, stability and unity in MCA.

The larger picture is important as preparations are being made for the next general election, speculated to run before the full five-year term in 2005.

The top leaders from both sides must now go on a nationwide road show to face the wrath of the grassroots and to explain why the peace plan is necessary.

On Tuesday, MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said all MCA leaders at the division, state and national levels would remain in their posts until the next party elections in 2005.

He said there would be no contest in MCA's 166 division elections. The same situation will apply at state, Youth, Wanita and national levels.

Urging the grassroots to work towards the no-contest arrangement, he said the central committee unanimously adopted the decision.

Over the past few weeks, behind-the-scene negotiations were carried out by, among others, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the aides of the Prime Minister and businessman Tan Sri Lim Kok Wing.

As with all negotiations, there were bumpy moments but the final result has been achieved - the MCA leadership crisis has come to an end.

Dr Mahathir and Abdullah have played a crucial role in ensuring that the final touches were agreeable to all to ensure that the peace agenda is accepted.

It is now important for the respective MCA leaders to explain the significance of the peace plan. There will be grudges and glitches, no doubt, but these are minor problems that can be sorted out.



There will be cases like the eight Youth leaders who have passed the age limit of 45 years old, and whether exceptions should be made to these cases. Representatives from both sides can sit down to resolve such internal problems.

Then there will be some divisions where the incumbent may have lost his right to keep his post because he may have lost his branch post, but these are rare.

The majority of the 166 divisions would probably remain the same with the status quo formula. The central committee members, irrespective of which faction they represent, will keep their positions for the next three years.

Dr Ling remains as president and Datuk Lim Ah Lek is still his deputy. The four vice-presidents - Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn, Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, Datuk Chua Jui Meng and Datuk Chan Kong Choy - keep their positions.

These are talented leaders and if one were to

look at the real issues behind the leadership crisis, there is really nothing substantial in the first place.

There should be no witchhunt and sincere efforts must be made to ensure that the spirit of the peace agenda is worked out. As Abdullah said, let bygones be bygones.

As with all families, there will be times when quarrels break out among the members but they need to come to their senses and compromise.

It has been said that we can choose our friends but never our relatives. Whatever their differences, MCA leaders must work things out even after harsh words have been exchanged.

The media can also play its role by not pitting one MCA leader against another. Instead, let the healing process work in the interest of the Chinese community and the nation.

As MCA leaders regain their composure and sieve through the countless rumours being circulated, they should set their sights and resources on ensuring the success of its projects - the setting up of Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman and the expansion of Tunku Abdul Rahman College.

More importantly, both sides must keep in mind that thoughtless words can wound as deeply as any sword but wisely spoken words can heal.

To compromise is not a sign of weakness but of strength and maturity. No MCA leader should feel ashamed to give peace a chance.

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